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CONTROL OF EUROPEAN RABBITS

Explanatory Statement

Shipments of rabbits from the San Juan Islands in the State of Washington constitute a hazard to American agriculture that should not be regarded lightly. These rabbits are European rabbits that became established years ago from releases of domestic strains of this species and possibly from wild European stock as well. Whatever their origin, the animals have reverted to type and have been living wild on the Islands for many years.

These so-called "San Juan rabbits," unlike native rabbits, are great burrowers. Their burrows and warrens may go as deep as nine feet, and a single warren may cover a quarter of an acre. On some Islands they have undermined buildings, caused bluffs to crumble, consumed all green vegetation down to ground level, and killed trees by eating bark of trunks and roots.

The European rabbit has increased to plague proportions and has become a serious pest in Australia, New Zealand, Tierra del Fuego, and other regions. In Great Britain, it is considered second only to rats and mice collectively as a source of damage. British experts believe that rabbit damage in their country amounts to 45 to 60 million pounds sterling a year. The rabbits devour truck crops and cereal crops. They kill orchard trees and damage pastures to such an extent that sheep have starved in competition with them. Control efforts costing millions of dollars a year have had little effect in lands infested with these rabbits. Extermination of wild rabbits is official policy in at least three countries, including Great Britain.

It is entirely possible that the European rabbit will become established in new areas as a result of liberations now being made. Should this happen the species is apt to spread and become an agricultural pest of greater economic significance than any native game or fur animal.

Since 1935 the importation of European rabbits into the United States has been prohibited by Federal law. However, the current shipments of "San Juan rabbits" are moving from the State of Washington to other States. Except in those instances where particular shipments of "San Juan rabbits" might involve animals suspected of being carriers of diseases transmissible to livestock or poultry (and we know of no cases where these animals have been so suspected), there is no existing basis for exercising Federal control over the inter-State transportation of these rabbits.

The suggested legislation declares European rabbits (as defined) to be harmful to the agriculture, grazing, forestry, and other vegetative resources of the State. It also provides that importation and release of these rabbits shall be subject to regulation and control by the appropriate State agency.

31-92-282

Suggested Legislation

[Title should conform to State requirements. The following is a suggestion: "An Act to control the importation and release of the European Rabbit."]

(Be it enacted, etc.)

1 Section 1. It is hereby declared to be the public
2 policy of the State, in order to protect and preserve the
3 agricultural, grazing, forestry and other vegetative resources
4 of the State, to control the importation and release of the
5 European rabbit and to otherwise prevent damages inflicted by
6 it upon such resources.

1 Section 2. For the purposes of this Act, the following
2 definitions shall apply:

3 (a) The "European rabbit" shall mean all rabbits of the
4 genus *Oryctolagus*, species *cuniculus*, whether or not existing
5 in a wild state or raised in captivity and shall include, but
6 not be limited to, the so-called San Juan rabbit occurring in
7 the United States principally in the San Juan archipelago,
8 Puget Sound, State of Washington.

9 (b) The term "person" shall mean any individual, firm,
10 partnership, corporation (public or private), association,
11 club, or other group of persons whether or not incorporated.

1 Section 3. The European rabbit is hereby declared to be
2 harmful to the agricultural, grazing, forestry and other
3 vegetative resources of the State and shall be subject to
4 regulation and control by the State agency.^{1/}

^{1/} The title of the appropriate state agency having responsibility for the agricultural resources of the State such as the State Board of Agriculture, the Department of Agriculture, or the Department of Agriculture and Conservation should be used wherever the term "state agency" appears in this bill.

1 Section 4. Regulations promulgated by the state agency
2 pursuant to section 3 of this Act shall include but need not
3 be limited to, provisions that (a) European rabbits shall not
4 be imported into the State without permission of the state
5 agency. (b) European rabbits transported into or possessed
6 within the State shall not be released except upon permission
7 and under the supervision of the state agency, and (c) any
8 person possessing European rabbits must report immediately to
9 the state agency the escape or other accidental release of
10 such rabbits. The regulations may also provide for the exten-
11 mination of European rabbits that have been released, have
12 escaped, or are running wild in areas where it is determined
13 by the state agency that they are doing serious damage to
14 agricultural, grazing, forestry, or other vegetative resources.

1 Section 5. Any person violating the provisions of this
2 Act or any regulations promulgated thereunder shall be guilty
3 of a misdemeanor and on conviction thereof shall be fined the
4 sum of not less than _____ nor more than _____ for
5 each offense.

1 Section 6. Insert effective date.

